DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 064 CG 030 159

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TITLE	Career Development Services in Ireland.
PUB DATE	2000-03-00
NOTE	21p.; In: Making Waves: Career Development and Public Policy. International Symposium 1999 Papers, Proceedings, and Strategies (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, May 2-4, 1999); see CG 030 145.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Vocational Education; *Career Development; Counselor Training; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Government Role; *Labor Force Development; National Programs; *Public Policy; School Business Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Ireland

ABSTRACT

In Ireland, the delivery of career guidance is strong in the education sector but relatively weak in the labor market sector. At the same time, it appears that most initiatives related to career guidance have been developed on an ad hoc basis. This is also true for initiatives related to labor market services, trade unions, and employers. It has been a "bottom up system" in Ireland, with the drive for change coming primarily from practitioners. Training and internal policies have been developed and implemented by the professional association, in many ways bypassing the policymakers and professional psychologists. The strength of the profession has rested in the self-reliance of the association, its innovation and grass-roots initiatives in the field. Challenges that still need to be considered include: (1) the need for a coherent policy framework across the education sectors and between education and labor market sectors; (2) the need for a national framework delineating the roles of different guidance practitioners, requisite training, qualifications, and consistent standards; (3) the need for effective information technology to provide meaningful career information; and (4) the need for a stable and adequate funding base to ensure meaningful provision of guidance programs and services. (ADT)

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ED 444 064

Career Development Services in Ireland

By

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15. CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES IN IRELAND

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Context

Governmental Structure

The powers and duties of government are set out in Article 28 of the Constitution. The Constitution divides the power to govern among the houses of the Oireachtas (Dail and Seanad), the cabinet (government) and the judiciary (courts).

The Cabinet consists of a *taoiseach* (prime minister) and ministers in charge of the following 11 departments:

- Minister for Finance
- Minister for Education and Science
- Minister for Social, Community or Family Affairs
- Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Minister for Defense and European Affairs
- Minister for Foreign Affairs
- Minister for the Environment and Local Government
- Minister for Transport, Energy and Communications
- Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands
- Minister for Health and Children.

The Seanad (Senate) is the second house of the Oireachtas. Members of the Senate are known as senators and its chairperson is known as *cathaoirleach*. There are 60 senators chosen by election and by nomination. Forty three senators are elected by five vocational panels:

- Culture and Education
- Agriculture
- Labour
- Industry and Commerce
- Public Administration
- Graduates of Trinity College elect three senators.
- Graduates of the National Universities of Ireland elect three senators.
- Eleven are nominated by the *taoiseach*.

The Education System
Compulsory education is from age 6 to 15 and is being extended to 16.

Primary schools
Primary schools are mainly denominational and funded by central government. They follow a common curriculum.

Second-level schools
There are three kinds of second-level schools in Ireland: secondary, community/comprehensive and vocational. Secondary schools are privately owned (mainly by religious orders) and state funded. Community comprehensive schools are state funded and centrally administered. Vocational schools and colleges are state funded but locally administered.

Education is free in all but five percent of secondary schools. The curriculum in second-level schools is a blend of the traditional academic subjects and the practical/technical subjects.

Junior cycle
The junior cycle provides for the final three years of compulsory education. Its aim is to give a broad and balanced course of study in a variety of subjects relevant to students' personal development, the world of work and the enjoyment of leisure and recreation. At the end of the junior cycle, students sit the Junior Certificate Examination/Junior Certificate Elementary Examination — centrally administered public examinations, with mainly an external marking system.

Transition year
This one-year program is offered between junior and senior cycle to those who intend to continue to the Leaving Certificate. Currently, 65 percent of students choose this option.

The program provides for the development of personal and social skills. It encourages research and activity-based, self-directed learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Other distinctive features of the transition year option are work experience and enterprise education, and mini companies.

Senior cycle
At the end of compulsory schooling, most students enter the senior cycle. This may consist of courses of one, two or three years' duration. The following are the principal options.

- **The Leaving Certificate Program** is taken by the majority of pupils. It is the basis for entry into higher education and training. It lasts for two years.

Figure 1: The Education and Training System in Ireland

	Universities	Institutes of Technology	Specialist and Private Colleges	Vocational Educational Colleges Post- Leaving Cert. Programs	Sectoral Vocational Training	
18 17 16 15	Second-Level Education Senior Cycle - Leaving Certificate - Leaving Certificate Vocational Program - Leaving Certificate Applied Program				Vocational Training Youth Reach	Apprenticeship
14	Transition Year					
13 12 11 10 9	Second Level Education – Junior Cycle (Secondary, Vocational, Comprehensive, Community Schools) - Junior Certificate - Junior Certificate Elementary					
8	First Level (Primary) Education (National Schools)					
7 6 5 4	First Level (Primary)Education (National Schools)		Preschool Education			

Compulsory Education

- **The Leaving Certificate Vocational Program** is a vocationally oriented variant for those intending to pursue a vocational or technical course after school, or who intend to go on to third-level education. All subjects are the same as for the Leaving Certificate except for the addition of three "link modules" on enterprise education, preparation for work and work experience.

- **The Leaving Certificate Applied** emphasizes personal development, experience learning, transferable skills and integration with the local employment environment. The program offers a wide range of courses, organized into modules. Students take a total of 40 modules over the two-year program.

Higher education
Higher education consists of universities, institutes of technology, specialist and private colleges (e.g., teacher training).

Further education
Further education encompasses a range of post-compulsory education and training options provided in the education sector, largely by vocational education committees (VECs), in both school and out-of-school settings. A wide range of bodies certifies the courses.

The developing qualifications of the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) are increasingly accepted as the definitive frame in which provision is set.

The main elements of further education are the following:

- Vocational Preparation and Training Courses (VPT) are at NCVA level I and are offered in a small number of schools. This provision has largely been supplanted by the Leaving Certificate Applied program.

- Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs) are provided in second-level schools. These courses offer an alternative to programs in higher education in depth of content and methodology. Certain PLCs are accepted as bridges into higher education. Courses adopt an integrated approach focussing on technical knowledge, core skills and work experience. Almost 50 percent of the time spent on these programs is devoted to knowledge and skills training related to employment with a further 25 percent on relevant work-based experience. PLC courses are taken by approximately 30 percent of an age cohort.

- Further education also includes the Youthreach Program for early school leavers, Traveller's Training Workshops and the Vocational

Training Opportunites Scheme (VTOS). These measures are aimed at learners who have left school early with poor qualifications.

- Adult and continuing education are also seen as part of further education and include a wide range of community education and literacy/numeracy provision. The main providers of adult education are VECs, community and comprehensive schools, and higher education institutes.

The Labour Market: FÁS

In the labour market area, FÁS, the National Training Authority has a statutory obligation to provide careers information and guidance services to employed and unemployed adults. The guidance element of FÁS services is quite sparse but is undergoing major improvement. The human resource departments of large organizations provide career development training for their staff. However, most employees in the private sector work in small to medium enterprises (SME) where career development services are virtually non-existent.

FÁS has a statutory role to provide adult guidance in accordance with the provisions of the *Labour Services Act* 1987:

> to provide, or arrange for the provision of, whether for reward or otherwise-services consisting of the provision of guidance, advice and information in respect of choice of career and employment and to assist (whether financially or otherwise) in, and co-ordinate, the provision of such services by others.

FÁS Policy on Adult Guidance

The policy FÁS adopted in relation to adult guidance has been informed by the legal imperative outlined above and by experience dealing with labour market policy issues since the constituent FÁS organizations were established — starting in 1967 with ANCO. Subsequently, the National Manpower Service was established in 1972, the Youth Employment Agency in 1981 and the Local Employment Service (LES) in 1993-95.

Employment Action Plan

In recent years, the focus on guidance of adults has become the focus of the above European Union (EU) policy approaches. FÁS have engaged with both objectives in the form, for example, of the Employment Action Plan. This latter provides for the systematic engagement of FÁS employment services with the unemployed in a process of guidance and counselling set out in operational guidelines and focussing on the guidance and counselling of adults seeking career opportunities. This could include referral to training/education or jobs/career path planning.

Up to August 1999, there were over 18,231 referrals under the Employment Action Plan nationally, of that number 10,305, attended for a career guidance interview, 4,850 were placed in jobs, education/training or an alternative proactive labour measure such as community employment. A further 1,642 were referred for more in-depth guidance and counselling. The remainder either dropped out or were unable to progress for personal reasons. Taking cumulative referrals (since September 1998) of individuals under 25 years old who had been unemployed for at least six months, as a sample, 75 percent of all those referred had left the live register by end of June 1999. Most had left for positive reasons (e.g., into a job or onto a training or education course).

Guidance Process

When the job seeker attends FÁS for an interview, a job-seeking action plan is developed, and the job seeker is referred to employment, relevant training, work experience or other labour market options. This includes the development of a career path with the job seeker through intensive vocational guidance. If particular training needs are identified by the job seeker, preferential access is given to FÁS training resources. Where necessary, the job seeker may be referred to the local employment service for more intensive guidance or counselling, or to another relevant agency. FÁS Placement Services has also developed a more proactive approach to employers to ensure the maximum number of job vacancies are available to job seekers approaching FÁS.

The FÁS placement officer is in continuous contact with the job seeker, throughout the process, to review, track and monitor progress. The challenge is to ensure that programs are openly available to all job seekers, particularly Employment Action Plan participants.

FÁS have also developed a sophisticated management system for tracking caseloads. It is used by both LES and FÁS with the tracking extending into workplace and education/training.

General

FÁS Employment Services provides dedicated advice, counselling, guidance and placement service, available to its clients (job seekers and employers) as follows.

- **For the unemployed/job seeker.** A guidance and information service gives opportunities in employment, education and training. Priority is given to job seekers reaching critical thresholds in their unemployment, the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. Each job seeker is given an intensive guidance and counselling interview resulting in an individual career plan.

The Job Club assists participants in confidence building, showing how jobs can be obtained and providing resources needed for an intensive search for work. The Job Club has a formal element (participants attend organized sessions on a part-time basis) and an informal or support element (participants use Club facilities and follow up job options). To date 20 Job Clubs have been established in LES areas. FÁS assists LES in drawing up proposals, manages the funding arrangements, and monitors and evaluates the operation of each Club. An independent evaluation is being undertaken to make recommendations for future developments.

A further 40 Job Clubs are being established within FÁS in 1999, and each region will host a number of Job Clubs by year end. In a buoyant labour market, the Job Club provides that final resource to those job seekers who are job ready but lack basic job-hunting skills. It is hoped this expansion of Job Club provision will increase placement rates by 10 percent.

- **For employers**. A staff recruitment service is proactive and responsive to employer needs. It gives priority to companies having difficulty recruiting suitable candidates for vacancies. It promotes employment programs, such as Jobstart and Workplace, to employers. One initiative, put in place in 1999, is the WATIS open employment system where vacancies are displayed on the Internet. Full use of E-commerce solutions and the development of a backup call centre are envisaged.

- **For FÁS trainers and sponsors of FÁS employment programs.** Recruitment, selection and referral services are available.

- **FÁS Careers Conference and Exhibition.** Opportunities 99, Ireland's largest careers exhibition and conference was organized by FÁS and took place in Dublin in February 1999. The exhibition brought together a host of companies offering employment opportunities. Education organizations also exhibited their range of education and training programs. FÁS put together a visual and practical display of FÁS training courses. A conference was also held on changing labour market trends both in Ireland and globally. The theme of the conference was, New Choices, New Challenges. This two-day conference featured speakers from Ireland, the United Kingdom and Hungary. Among the topics covered were: youth employment and unemployment, matching the needs of employers and potential employees, employment prospects and trends in Ireland, how the education system can respond to labour market change, employee placement techniques and the use of information technology in career guidance and assessment.

Vocational Education and Training

Initial vocational education and training includes a wide range of provisions.

Apprenticeship
This is the traditional path to skilled jobs. This new standards-based apprenticeship has been replacing the time-served system on a phased-in basis since 1995. It provides alternating on-the-job, off-the-job training in conjunction with FÁS training centres and institutes of technology. Approximately six percent of school leavers follow this route.

Skills Training
In areas, such as tourism and catering, farming (including horticulture) and fishing, training is available and can involve apprenticeship-type training. This includes:

- training courses for first-time job seekers and young unemployed individuals (including enterprise training); and
- training in a wide range of professional areas or sections, such as the Armed Forces, The Garda Siochana, nursing, banking, accountancy, transport, management and administration.

The area of education and training comes under the remit of two distinct government departments, namely:

- Education and Science
- Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The Department of Education and Science is the main provider of vocational education and training (PLC, Youthreach, Traveller Training Workshops, VTOS) and is a joint provider for apprenticeship education.

Career Decision Making

Individuals make decisions within the education and training systems at transitional points in their educational careers:

Junior → Senior cycle → Further and higher education → Job/career

The individual has the right of choice regarding the area of study, but factors, such as competency in a subject, influence the subject chosen and the level of mastery of those subjects.

Entry to higher and further education involves a competitive weighting system (POINTS), used to decide applications. This can place limits on the degree of personal choice in deciding on a further education course, as do specific faculty/course requirements of Leaving Certificate subjects.

It goes without saying that personal factors such as low self-esteem also have a self-limiting effect on choice.

Current Provision

The main current provision of guidance services and the ministries and units responsible for implementation, both inside and outside the educational sector, are outlined in tables 1 and 2.

The Education Act (1998)

This Act lists the provision of guidance and counselling as a service second-level schools ought to provide. However, it makes no statement on actual student entitlement. This rests with school management. The provision of guidance services in higher education is the responsibility of the higher education institute concerned. The provision of guidance in adult, community education and literacy programs depends on the interest and goodwill of the provider but, generally, is non-existent.

Some private guidance agencies provide paid services.

Training Programs for Guidance Counsellors

- The one-year, full-time, post-graduate diploma in guidance is available from University College Dublin, University College Cork and the National University of Ireland Maynooth. A master of education in guidance is required by the Department of Education for employment in second-level schools.

- A part-time program, leading to a master of science in counselling, is provided by the Marino Institute of Education in association with Iona University, New York. This program, which lasts three to four years, is recognized for employment in second-level schools.

- In 1997, the University of Limerick began offering a graduate diploma in guidance counselling. It is part time and takes two years. This course also has Department of Education recognition for employment in second-level schools. The course is presented at Limerick and Carrick-on-Shannon.

Table 1: Target Group and Administrative Control of Guidance Services

	Guidance Service	Administrative Control	Clients
1.	Guidance and counselling in schools	Department of Education	Aged 12-19: pupils attending post-primary schools
2.	Careers advisory services in third-level institutions	Universities and colleges	Mainly aged 19-22: students attending most major third-level institutions
3.	Youth Information Service	Local voluntary agencies	Aged 15-25
4.	Employment Service	National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS)	Aged 15+
5.	Guidance and counselling for adults	Department of Enterprise and Employment	Aged 18+: long-term unemployed
6.	Employment Support Service	Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	Unemployed
7.	Unemployment resource centres	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Aged 18+: unemployed
8.	Guidance for disabled persons	National Rehabilitation Board	Aged 16+: disabled persons
9.	Private guidance agencies	Private	All ages

Table 2: Content of Guidance Services and Title and Training of Staff

	Main Services	Staff	Training and Qualifications
1.	Interviews, curricular programs, information, counselling, life-skills programs, assessment	Guidance counsellor	Degree + education diploma: 1 year (FT) diploma or 2 years (FT) MEd
2.	Interviews, some group work, information, placement	Careers and appointments officer/advisor	Degree + various (no specific qualification)
3.	Information, referral.	Youth information officer	Various
4	Guidance elements in training courses, advocacy, mentoring, information, placement	Employment service officer, advocate, mentor	Various
5.	Interviews, information, assessment, placement, advocacy	Mediator, guidance counsellor	Various and PT post-graduate
6.	Interview, information, referral, facilitation	Job facilitators	Various and ST courses
7.	Advice, information, adult education	Social welfare staff	Various
8.	Interviews, information, assessment, placement	Psychologist	Psychology degree
9.	Interviews, assessment	Counsellor/consultant	Various

FT = full time
PT = part time

- The Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, Maynooth began postgraduate diploma and certificate courses in adult guidance for FÁS staff in 1997 and 1998.

Effective and innovative practices

Much innovative practice is school/institution based. The National Centre for Guidance in Education supports innovation nationally. It is assisted in this by the Department of Education and Science, and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors has been in the forefront of innovation in guidance since its inception in 1973.

The Labour Market

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) has administrative responsibility for guidance services in the labour market area. This responsibility is mainly discharged through FÁS and LES. In some areas, LES is managed by FÁS. In other areas, LES is managed through area partnership companies (APC) which represent social partners and community interests in joint initiatives to combat long-term unemployment through local social and economic development.

The Department of Community, Family and Social Affairs (DCFSA) also contributes through its Employment Support Services (ESS). The Department of Education and Science (DES) has administrative responsibility for guidance services within further and adult education.

Guidance provision for adults with disabilities is provided by the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) and through the National Training and Development Institute (NTDI). Funding for the NRB is provided by the Department of Health and Children, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The NTDI is a private, not-for-profit organization.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) established a national network of Unemployment Resource Centres in the mid-1980s. The centres are funded through ICTU member subscriptions. They also receive some DETE funding through FÁS and DES funding through the Vocational Education Committees.

Ongoing Training of Adult Guidance Staff

FÁS, in conjunction with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, developed the Certificate Course in Adult Guidance and Counselling (Theory and Practice), for FÁS Employment Services and LES staff. This course addresses the needs of those working in a guidance capacity with unemployed adults. It is delivered in an open learning format, where participants attend seven workshops and complete home-based assignments. The course provides a basic level, professional qualification

for those working in a guidance setting with unemployed adults. It also forms a pathway for staff wishing to pursue further qualifications in the field, and contributes to the development of a professional guidance and placement service.

A diploma/higher diploma in arts (adult guidance and counselling) was also developed by FÁS in association with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. This course is designed to serve as an accredited training program for people working with adults in a guidance/ counselling setting, and providing information, advice and placement services. It meets the longer term development needs of both FÁS and LES staff. Each course runs over two academic years and combines distance learning, regular tutorial workshops and home-based assignments and projects. An evaluation of this course began in 1998 and will make recommendations for future development needs of staff working in a guidance and counselling role with unemployed adults.

LES mediators engaged in the LES Network have received training in career path development and placement through an intensive six-day course. The Central FÁS Placement Services Unit is developing a self-assessment support manual for LES mediators.

All mediation staff members have been trained to use the Caseload Management System developed by FÁS. This system enables the mediator to track clients through guidance and career path planning. LES co-ordinators have been trained in management information systems, also developed by FÁS, which enable local LES areas to analyze their interaction with clients. The LES Mediators Forum, in conjunction with the FÁS Central Support Unit, organized and facilitated training workshops for mediators focussing on group work in the mediation process and the role of the mediator in exploring enterprise opportunities with unemployed clients.

Effective and Innovative Practices

Careers information

A new computerized self-assessment, called Career Directions, has been developed. This new system will allow users to conduct a self-assessment, based on an interest inventory. The system will then produce a list of possible career options, which the user can interrogate further, using the computer system. A photofile is linked to the choices produced, and the user can view five action photographs of each occupation.

The system has been developed with the adult unemployed user in mind and has already proven to be a very useful and accurate career guidance tool for this group. Eventually, the system will be on the Web. Initially, it is available on each computer in Employment Services offices. It will also be offered to schools for the senior school-leaver group.

Information technology systems
FÁS has continued to update the software program and provide technical and training support for the Caseload Management System which is used in FÁS Employment Services and LES areas, to enable the counsellor/mediator to track clients through a process of career guidance and planning.

Standards and quality in adult guidance
FÁS has established standards for quality measurement in all its training and employment programs, including adult guidance and counselling. Along with the promulgation of the Euro Counsel Guidelines within FÁS Employment Services, FÁS has developed operational standards and guidelines for the delivery of guidance services to adults. These guidelines are published and distributed by the Program Development Division of FÁS that has policy responsibility for the development of guidance services within FÁS. They are also available on the FÁS Intranet.

A number of evaluations of the guidance services FÁS provides have been completed, and others are ongoing in a constant review and improvement process.

Current Policy Issues

Education
The 1990s have seen particular attention being paid to policy issues relating to guidance in education. In the Green Paper (1992), "Education for a Changing World," guidance was described as services, programs and activities aimed at helping students understand themselves and their potential, leading to positive attitudes and behaviours, and satisfying and fulfilling educational and career choices. Appraisal, information and counselling were identified as key components of guidance.

Guidance was also perceived as a school-wide responsibility. The School Guidance Committee of the Department of Education was given the remit to prepare guidelines for guidance provision and to develop an action plan for guidance in education. In the subsequent White Paper (1995), "Charting our Education Future," reference to guidance was very sparse. For the junior cycle curriculum, each school was expected to provide students with the experience of guidance, counselling and pastoral care. Targeted support interventions for students with special needs included the provision of guidance counsellors. There was no reference in either document to guidance provision in primary schools, in Youthreach (second chance), initial vocational education and training, in higher education and for adults in education.

The Operational Program for Human Resources and Development (1994-99) published in 1995 makes reference to a responsive guidance service as a preventive measure to assist the social integration of those experiencing difficulty during their period in education and in their transition from school to work. It mentions that an estimated 50 guidance posts were allocated to schools in disadvantaged areas. Among the measures mentioned to improve the quality of training provision were support for:

- Career guidance/employment links. To improve the knowledge and skills of teachers/counsellors in developing programs and links with the labour market in order to develop the vocational skills of students.

- Counselling skills. Developing skills for teachers and trainers to deal with parents and the wider community, and students with behavioural problems, and to help program participants discover, clarify and assess their learning needs, and the various ways of meeting these needs.

- Training Youthreach staff in group facilitation and counselling skills.

The recently published Green Paper on adult education (1998), "Adult Education in an Era of Life Long Learning," points out that there is no system of guidance and counselling in the education sector to cater to adult needs, and The Back to Education Initiative, allied with the growth in provision in adult literacy, will require the provision of guidance, counselling and psychological services to support those who have already embarked on education programs. It recommends the establishment of a national comprehensive system of guidance and counselling to meet the whole range of needs of adult learners.

Policy with respect to guidance provision can also be referenced through social partnership national agreements, such as the Program for Economic and Social Progress (1991-94) which included a minimum allocation for guidance in schools with student populations of 350 to 499 pupils. In 1995, the government established the National Centre for Guidance in Education to support and develop guidance across education sectors. It also allocated 100 additional posts for guidance (which particularly benefited schools with very small and very large student populations) and 27 teaching counsellor posts in primary schools to support children experiencing difficulty in education. In 1998, the teacher counsellor project was completed and extended to include an additional 10 teacher-counsellors These latest appointments have been designated support teachers. Their role is to address problems of disruptive pupils.

In 1998, the Taskforce for Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Services for Youthreach was established by the Department of Education

and Science, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment jointly. It was given a budget to provide a locally integrated response for early and unqualified school leavers.

The Department of Education and Science has supported the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) in several developmental initiatives to improve guidance provision in education, particularly, in post-primary schools, Youthreach and adult education. In the context of post-primary schools, the NCGE finalized "Guidelines for the Practice of Guidance and Counselling in Schools" (1996) which subsequently was adopted as departmental policy. The Guidelines were significant in setting down the three-dimensional nature of guidance provision in education in Ireland — educational, career and personal/social — and in defining the responsibilities of school management, the Department of Education, school staff, guidance counsellors, parents and pupils in the provision and process of guidance. Following this, the NCGE initiated discussions with relevant bodies on the development of whole-school review mechanisms for guidance and of in-service training to accompany this. The Department of Education and Science and the NCGE are jointly developing an action plan for guidance. To date, this has involved a review of initial training of guidance counsellors with the directors of the six training programs, and a review of information and communication technology needs of guidance practitioners for hardware, software, training and support. In 1996, the Department of Education and Science supported the Fourth European Conference on Guidance in the Information Society, as part of the European Union Presidency Education Program. The Conference was organized by the NCGE.

In the Youthreach context, the Department of Education and Science has supported a program of training Youthreach staff in front-line guidance skills, organized by the NCGE with EU Youthstart funding. In the field of adult educational guidance the Department of Education and Science has supported a program in the management of adult educational guidance services for adult education organizers to develop suitable models of guidance provision in a variety of settings.

With regards to the European dimension of guidance, the Department of Education and Science has established the National Resource Centre for Guidance under the PETRA II program at Léargas. Its functions were incorporated into the NCGE on its establishment in 1995.

The International Section of the Department of Education and Science has been very active at the EU level in ensuring a place for educational and vocational guidance in the new post-2000 Leonardo de Vinci program and, particularly, in the Socrates program where, despite the fact that guidance

provision in the EU is mainly located in the education sector, there was no previous reference to guidance innovation in Socrates 1995-99.

Guidance provision in the field of higher education seems to be the least referenced in policy documents. The autonomy of higher education institutions has led to a wide range and scope of guidance provision.

The university sector has been developing graduate placement and guidance, and counselling services since the early 1970s. The institutes of technology have only recently begun to address this need. Recent studies of non-completion rates in higher education, combined with labour market skills shortages, are cause for concern about the adequacy of guidance provision and learner support at both post-primary and higher education levels. Part of the work program of the NCGE examines current support and development issues for guidance and counselling in higher education.

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) represents guidance counsellors working in second-level schools. It maintains and reviews a number of policy and position statements to which its members subscribe, including a code of ethics. It has active sub-committees on policy and professional practice. Its "Policy Statement on Training" (1995) has been a catalyst in establishing minimum training standards for postgraduate courses in guidance. Through lobbying, it also acts as a means of effecting change in government policy.

In summary then, policy issues relating to the provision of guidance services in education remain somewhat of a patchwork quilt with some areas (e.g., post-primary education where most guidance practitioners work) receiving more attention than others and having a more coherent approach. In the most underdeveloped areas of guidance provision, there is a growing consciousness of the needs for a policy framework. The use of guidance as a tool to combat social exclusion is a recurrent policy theme.

Labour Market

Very difficult clients

There is a need for special guidance provision and interventions through FÁS and LES for clients who are not ready to progress toward education, training and employment.

Employer and trade union responsibility

With some exceptions, both employers and trade unions have not played an active role in promoting the concept of lifelong learning and the key role of guidance provision to support continuing employability. A major attitudinal change is required along with the education of the social partners concerning guidance.

Access to guidance services for the employed

Employed persons have difficulty accessing state guidance provision as it is only available during daytime working hours. If employed persons wish to have guidance outside of working hours, they have to resort, at their own cost, to private guidance agencies. This can be prohibitive for many.

Key Issues for the Future

- The need for a coherent policy framework for guidance provision across the education sectors.
- The need for a coherent policy framework to link provision in education and labour market sectors.
- The development of educational and vocational guidance provision within the education sector to promote social inclusion.
- The development of educational and vocational guidance provision within the education sector to combat non-completion rates in higher education.
- The need to interweave national policy on guidance in education with EU policy developments on lifelong guidance.
- The need to develop guidance policy in education in the context of lifelong learning.
- The development of a national framework for different guidance practitioner roles, and a training, qualifications and award body strategy to match the framework.
- The development of a national strategy to harness the potential of information and communication technologies in guidance to benefit both clients and practitioners.
- The need for funding for the provision of a meaningful guidance service (e.g., practitioner/student ratio) in all areas of education.

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